

Maternal Matters and Other Sisters
Artist Catalogue

Lena Simic

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Liverpool Hope
University

at the
Bluecoat.



The Institute
for the Art
and Practice of
Dissent at Home

This artist catalogue has been produced for my solo performance **Masha Serghyeevna** (Bluecoat, Liverpool 2009) and while it predominantly focuses on this particular work, it also overviews the last five years (2004 – 2009) of my performance making processes and practice:

Medea/Mothers' Clothes (Bluecoat, Liverpool 2004)

Magdalena Makeup (Art Workshop Lazareti, Dubrovnik and Old Police Station Community Centre on Lark Lane, Liverpool 2004)

Joan Trial (Nuffield Theatre, Lancaster 2005)

Contemplation Time (2007-08)

Sid Jonah Anderson by Lena Simic (MAP Live, Source Café, Carlisle 2008)

The Institute for the Art and Practice of Dissent at Home (2007-ongoing).

The first part of the catalogue notes **Masha Serghyeevna** and its processes whilst the second part of the catalogue gathers an array of commissioned critical perspectives, creative responses and affirmative contexts for my previous work from friends, colleagues and myself. Short descriptions of all of the mentioned arts projects, an extract from **Joan Trial** performance text and full **Masha Serghyeevna** performance text are also included.

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Helen Simpson for stories,

Sonja Stahor for design,

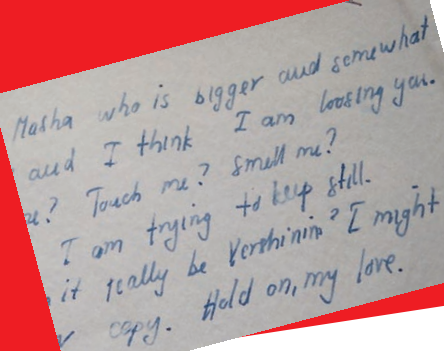
Gary Anderson, Neal, Gabriel and Sid at the The Institute for the Art and Practice of Dissent at Home for love.

I started working on **Masha Serghyeevna** in January 2006 during the Split Britches workshop at Lancaster University. Masha Serghyeevna is the middle one from Chekhov's Three Sisters. She is married and she is beautiful. She wears black. For the duration of the play she has an affair with Vershinin, a melancholic and philosophizing officer, who is destined to leave her and go off to another war. Some words get exchanged between them with the promise of letter writing. My performance is set after Chekhov. I wonder if Masha ever wrote letters to Vershinin; I wonder what happened at the end of the play; I wonder where Vershinin has gone and whose war he was fighting.

As Masha I wrote letters to Vershinin in the winter of 2007. Those letters were always written on my travels, the time I was away from my everyday routine and with space to think. I sent my letters as Masha addressed to Officer Vershinin to the addresses of my seven friends, members of Factory Floor network for women performers and writers: Clare Duffy, Emily Underwood, Louie Jenkins, Abi Lake, Caroline Wilson, Kerstin Bueschges and Jodie Allinson. All but one have been sent back to me.

MASHA SERGHYEEVNA

Sender: Masha Serghyeevna
19 Livingston Court
Liverpool, L17 8XZ, UK



Masha who is bigger and somewhat
and I think I am losing you.
Touch me? Smell me?
I am trying to keep still.
it really be Vershinin? I might
copy. Hold on, my love.

26/01/2007 from a letter sent to Clare's address in Edinburgh

Dear Vershinin

...

I am still your Masha. Masha who is bigger and somewhat older and somewhat sad and I think I am losing you. Can you remember me? Touch me? Smell me? I am forgetting you and I am trying to keep still. What is your name? Can it really be Vershinin? I might have forgotten my Chekhov copy. Hold on, my love.

09/02/2007 from a letter sent to Emily's address in Cardiff

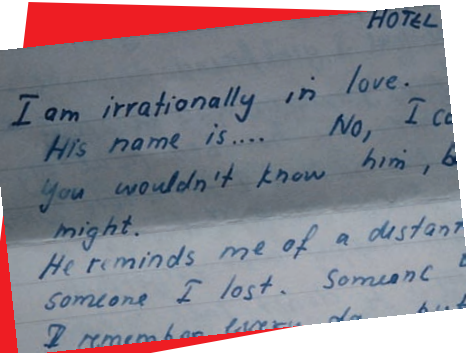
Dear Vershinin

I am irrationally in love.

...

He reminds me of a distant lover, someone I lost. Someone whose name I remember every day, but only the name, not him, not his face, not his voice. I don't even think about him anymore.

Now I'm in love. I watch him in the dark. I watch him as he watches some performance artists during their weird politics on stage. I watch his body, his pants, his top, his hair, the way he holds himself, his youthful clumsiness, the way he holds a plastic cup of beer, the way he talks to a girl, the way a girl flirts with him and he smiles.



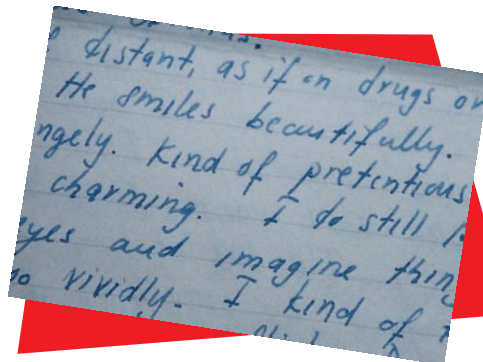
HOTEL
I am irrationally in love.
His name is.... No, I can't
you wouldn't know him, but
might.
He reminds me of a distant
someone I lost. Someone
I remember every day.

10/02/2007 from a letter sent to Caroline's address in Manchester

Dear Vershinin

...

He talks to me about arts and politics, the usual. I am incapable of flirting with him. It's beyond me. I talk seriously. I look at the bar. I worry he's bored by me and wants to go away. I worry I'll look at him and see he's occupied by something else. He isn't. He keeps talking to me and looking at me.



distant, as if on drugs or
He smiles beautifully.
ngely. Kind of pretentious
charming. I do still
eyes and imagine things
so vividly. I kind of

11/02/2007 from a letter sent to Louie's address in Brighton

Dear Vershinin

...

Anyway I don't think I'm that much in love anymore. The fever is passing. I do still imagine us meeting in a B&B in Carlisle or Scarborough.



Truly Yours
Masha
get the photos re-printed for your deeper



Olga and Irene? Have
 you heard of Chekhov?
 Have heard of Moscow and
 falling in love and to
 affairs. They must

16/02/2007 from a letter sent to Kerstin's address in
 Lancaster

Dear Vershinin

...
 Be blindfolded and feminine. Be passive. Be in my red dress.
 Walk across stage blindfolded in your red dress.
 Dance on stage blindfolded in your red dress.
 Do your 1-10 movement scores in your red dress. Not
 blindfolded.
 Do your 10-1 movement scores slowly.
 Do your 10-1 movements quickly.
 Find someone to fall in love with in the audience. There is
 no one to fall in love with in this room.
 Where are you now? Where are you? Will our bodies meet
 again? Where are you? I need you to keep breathing... To be.
 To be. To be.
 I need to introduce myself. Yes, as Masha. I am not sure they
 will know who I am. Have they heard of my sisters, Olga and
 Irene? Have they heard of you, Verzhinin? Have they heard
 of Chekhov? They must have heard of Moscow and longing,
 and falling in love and boring husbands and affairs. They must
 have heard of snow in the hair and dance and wind. They must
 have heard about women like me, suffocating in marriage
 made young and dressed in black, and enjoying poetry and
 affairs. And women like Olga whose life revolves round work
 and migraines. And girls like Irene whose life will slip away,
 who sees her dreams disappear.

all are.
 Remember to use
 Remember to use
 Remember to use

22/02/2007 from a letter sent to
 Abi's address in Borth

Dear Vershinin

...
 I'm on train, going to Winchester where I am performing
 tonight. Some naughty youths were playing some reggae
 music on their portable player. I also heard a song by
 Sublime, the band from Long Beach that I used to listen to
 in my early 20s or rather late teens. Sublime reminded me
 of an ex-lover and I almost texted him about these naughty
 youths, reggae, Sublime and their snogging on the train...
 but then the conductor came and told them to switch off
 their happy music and now the revolution is all gone. The
 revolution ended in Reading.

...
 There are no revolutionaries really. Just the users of
 gimmicks of our time... How fooled we all are.
 Remember to use some Sublime music.
 Remember to use some CCCP.
 Remember to use some Waltz.
 They started using their player again. It's not as loud and
 the music is rubbish, one of those generic groups with
 generic sound with generic thoughts about revolution. They
 are not really disobedient, they are only trendy and I'm sick
 of them.
 How's your war? I haven't heard from you in a while. Can
 you still be bothered? Have you found someone sweeter,
 younger and happier? Someone less melancholic and care-
 free? Someone who laughs?

The missing letter was sent to Jodie's address in Cardiff in March. It got lost. That was the letter about the revolution. I therefore commissioned my friend Zoë to write me a letter about revolution. Zoë and I talked for hours in the Place, a café in London on the day I wrote my original letter to Vershinin, that lost letter about the revolution. I reckoned Zoë must have had some thoughts about it, some kind of memory of our conversation. On that day in April 2007 I also re-read Heiner Müller's *Hamletmachine*. (This was a year I started working as a lecturer Liverpool Hope; I needed to analyze the play with the students). The imagined revolution stayed with me.

Zoë wrote from Berlin on the 13th January 2008. Her letter was written on white and red paper in order to encourage revolutionary thoughts as well as aestheticise and historicise it. Zoë wrote about her work in the theatre, ideas of home, wandering, impatience for adventures, Kleist, tenderness, pain, young couples, cafés and the confusion she once felt between love and revolution. She wrote that the revolution was just as unlikely to happen in English as it was unlikely to be televised. She claimed we were both too comfortable. She persuaded me that anyone who told you that revolution happens from within was probably trying to sell you a beauty product. She admired solidarity and collectivity. She mentioned her friends: a despairing email received from Lahore in Pakistan; Antonio who told her about a failed attempt of revolution in Mexico City in 2006 and a small theatre collective from Berlin who really tried to trigger revolution in Berlin in the late 1980s but got only global capitalism for their pains. She concluded that friendship was also a pre-requisite of revolution.

This performance has to do with revolution, with a certain impossibility of revolution, with a retreat to arts practice as a form of revolution. This performance also has to do with daydreaming, imagination and desire. Politics as well. History. Letters. Friendship. Love. Being in love.

This performance is dedicated to soldiers, determination and hopelessness, to human stupidity and intolerance. To love letters across the world that are lost and unsent. To stories untold. To lives cut short. To youth. To hope in the youth of today. To my wasted Vershinins, to the world so full of Vershinins, soldiers, poets, foolish, badly dressed, penniless idealists, revolutionaries. To hope which seemed apparent in 1901, to progress, to history and to future. To my own growing up, teenage years, the socialist Yugoslavia, just before the 1990s war.

Back in Yugoslavia in the 1980s when I was in school, Chekhov was interpreted as a revolutionary playwright. He was on our obligatory reading list. On the one side, there was the decaying aristocracy like the Ranevskayas in *Cherry Orchard* or the Prozorovs in *The Three Sisters* and on the other the proletarian force coming in, like Lopakhin who buys the Cherry Orchard in order to chop it down, or Natasha who marries Andrey and messes up the whole Prozorovs household. After the war, in 1990s student production in Bratislava, Slovakia, I played Natasha. Things have changed since Chekhov, my school days, the Yugoslav war, and my student days. This performance is about coming to terms with that.

A version of this article titled 'Masha Writes to Vershinin' had previously appeared in journal *The Open Page: Women Theatre Letters* in July 2008



ARTS PROJECTS

2004 - 2009

7 Masha Serghyeevna

Solo Performance

2009

The Bluecoat, Liverpool, UK

A Re-working of Anton Chekhov's *Three Sisters* into a solo performance based around the middle sister character. This performance explores the boundaries between desire and revolution.

6 The Institute for the Art and Practice of Dissent at Home

Home-run art activist initiative, run out of the spare room of a council house

2007 - present

in Everton, Liverpool, UK

www.twoaddthree.org

The Institute is run by a family of two adults and three kids, collectively, twoaddthree (Gary Anderson, Lena Simic, Neal 9, Gabriel 7 and Sid 2). The Institute is a self-sufficient and sustainable initiative drawing from 10% of all income from its members (Gary and Lena work as university lecturers as well as freelance artists, children receive child tax credits and child benefit). The Institute is concerned with dissent, homemade aesthetics, financial transparency as well as critiquing the capitalism of culture as was embodied in Liverpool08, European Capital of Culture. The Institute is interested in social transformation and has refigured a part of the family living space (third spare bedroom) into a meeting place for artists, activists and cultural dissenters. This activity is undertaken in order to develop and extend dialogues about a 'culture' not necessarily driven by market forces. The Institute has hosted a number of artist residencies and events, ranging from individual encounters through group conversations to theatrical performances. The Institute has presented work, created interventions, made performances, critiqued and dissented at the Bluecoat, HAZARD08, FACT, Liverpool Biennial, Arnolfini, Artsadmin and PSi.

5 Sid Jonah Anderson by Lena Simic

Live Art Event

MAP Live at Source Café in Carlisle, UK

2008

The performance features my third baby Sid, who was born on the 7th August 2007, then 7 months old. The performance stages Sid's bedtime routine. The live action on stage consisted of performing the daily routine with Sid: bathing, dressing, feeding, laying down to sleep. Thus this very banal everyday action gets heightened through its staging: my movement on stage is quite sharp, neat and timed whilst the performance space and props are highly organized. The action was complemented by audio-visual footage: home body painting of my pregnant tummy into a Yugoslav (meaning a non existent, impossible, past) flag, extracts from my diary, which I have kept since my last month of pregnancy, and photographs from my walks in the park. The video footage references my maternity leave, that laborious and contemplative in between time, in fragments, with interruptions, through routine. This is about the impossible expectations placed on the mother and a revolutionary child. The event was done partly through my own desire to thoroughly connect my two spheres of life: children and art and acknowledge the labour of parenting within an arts context. Thus the piece addressed and collapsed the difference between arts making and explicit mothering.

4 Contemplation Time: A Document of Maternity Leave

Text and photographs
2007 - 08

Diary entries and photographic images of my repetitive visits with Sid to a local park (Sefton Park in Liverpool) and a specific park bench during my maternity leave, between 5 July 2007 and 27 April 2008. This diary has for me become a generative, critical and contemplative space which charts, marks and critiques notions of the maternal in the time around the baby's birth and during my maternity leave. The project is also presented as artist pages 'Impossible Expectations and Everyday Interventions: A Document of Maternity Leave,' in n.paradoxa: International Feminist Art Journal, edition entitled 'Incidental' (2008).

3 Joan Trial

Solo Performance
2005 - 07
www.joantrial.org

Nuffield Theatre, Lancaster, UK 2005
ShowRoom, University of Chichester, UK 2006
Leeds Met Studio Theatre, UK 2006
Cornerstone Festival at Liverpool Hope University, UK 2006
Stories to be Told Transit festival at Odin Teatret, Denmark 2007
National Review of Live Art, Glasgow, UK 2007

A forty-five minutes performance which combines documentary and homemade audio-visual footage with my live action on stage. The live action is a combination of autobiographical monologues, physical score tasks and extracts from the Joan of Arc fifteenth century trials for heresy. The structure of the performance follows this repetitive pattern: autobiographical monologue with a still image of Joan of Arc in the background, a physical score task with the moving homemade or documentary audio-visual footage in the background and the re-enactment of Joan of Arc trials with still images of the figure in the background. When first developing the project I approached the figure of Joan of Arc through the reading and sound recording of her fifteenth century trials for heresy as well as revisiting the monologues from George Bernard Shaw's Saint Joan (1923) and Jean Anouilh's The Lark (1953) that I first performed in the days of my drama school training. My performance material consisted of filming my family and friends in Liverpool and Dubrovnik, rewriting stories from my childhood memories and using documentary footage from the 'War in Dubrovnik' DVD (VSP Video, date unknown). Joan Trial is my intervention into the themes of heroism, religion and war: the performance puts on trial my Catholic upbringing and offers a personal story about the Yugoslav war through the female heroine archetype of Joan of Arc.

2 Magdalena Makeup

Live Art Event

2004

www.magdalenamakeup.org

Karantena - Multimedia Arts Festival, Art Workshop Lazareti, Dubrovnik, Croatia

Old Police Station, Lark Lane Community Centre, Liverpool, UK

A performative paper at 'The Articulate Practitioner - Articulating Practice' forum, Aberystwyth 2005 and at 'Diasporic Futures: Women, the Arts and Globalization' conference, Victoria and Albert Museum, London, 2006.

A live art event devised as a series of one-to-one sessions between individual members of the audience and myself as the performer in my Mary Magdalene figure: an exotic Other in a red silk dress and makeup. During each fifteen minute session the audience member enters a small enclosed space with the performer, watches a ten minutes autobiographical film about my connection to Mary Magdalene figure through my given name Magdalena and gets to have their feet anointed, a ritual reminiscent of the Biblical act that Mary Magdalene supposedly performed for Jesus. Through the figure of the exotic Other, Magdalena Makeup explores the notion of 'home' as an attempt to connect/juxtapose two cities: Liverpool (my resident home) and Dubrovnik (my place of birth). These two cities become connected through the act of sending postcards, initiated by the members of the audience. Each member of the audience is handed a stamped and addressed post card with my face on it and asked to post the post card 'back home where I belong'.

1 Medea/Mothers' Clothes

Live Art Event and Performance Research

2004 - 2007

www.medeamothersclothes.org

Bluecoat Arts Centre, Liverpool, UK 2004

emergency, greenroom, Manchester, UK 2004

Brunel University, London, UK 2004

'Magdalena Sin Fronteras' festival, Teatro Guiñol, Santa Clara, Cuba 2005

InterUniversity Centre, Dubrovnik, Croatia 2005

Performance Art Carlisle Event, Source Café, Carlisle, UK 2006

John Thaw Studio Theatre, Manchester University, UK, 2006

'Medea: Mutations and Permutations of a Myth' interdisciplinary conference, Bristol University, UK 2006

On the Edge, University of Hull @ Scarborough, UK 2006

University of Winchester, UK 2007

A thirty minute long solo performance, developed as a part of my practice as research Ph.D. entitled '(Dis)Identifying Female Archetypes in Live Art' at Lancaster University. In my performance I bring Medea, as the archetypal anti-mother figure, into dialogue with a group of contemporary Liverpool mothers drawn from two toddler groups. The performance is an artistic and feminist response to social and cultural constrictions that I have experienced as a foreigner (a Croatian, resident in Britain) and as a mother of three British children. Medea/Mothers' Clothes stages an intervention into cultural mythmaking about Medea by drawing on my daily experiences of 'foreign motherhood' and my place within a community of Liverpool mothers. The performance draws on the figure Medea as a means of critiquing, trans-coding and rebelling against prescribed maternal ideals.

**CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES
CREATIVE RESPONSES
AND
AFFIRMATIVE CONTEXTS**

Maternal Matters: The Political Aesthetic of Lena Simic

* by Imogen Tyler

I think about the daily routines mothers are expected to maintain. I think about parents who only want what's best for their kids. I think about the impossible expectations placed on mothers. I feel trapped. I feel out of the game. I feel like an outsider. It feels good.
Simic from Contemplation Time

The current noisy political and public debate which circulates around the maternal body is fraught and contradictory. Whilst maternity has never been so visible in popular culture, consider for example celebrity motherhood, the imagery available to communicate maternal experience is limited and only particular versions of maternal experience are visible and communicable. Since 2003 the Croatian born, Liverpool based, performance artist Lena Simic has produced an extraordinary body of

artistic work which, drawing on a history of feminist performance art, offers an alternative to the hegemony of contemporary representations of the maternal and captures something of the ambivalence peculiar to maternal experience. In what follows, I will touch briefly on three of Simic's recent projects,

Medea/Mothers' Clothes (2004) **Contemplation Time: A Document of Maternity Leave** (2007-2008) and **Sid Jonah Anderson by Lena Simic** (March 2008).

Medea/Mothers' Clothes (2004)

is a 30 minutes long solo performance which includes a slide show, audio-visual footage and live action. Medea is the archetypal anti-mother of Greek Myth who revenges her betrayal by her husband by murdering their young children. It may seem odd that Simic employs this murderous figure to explore the shared experiences of motherhood in the two Liverpool toddler groups she attends with her small children. However, for Simic, the mythic Medea is a means of interrogating, translating and giving voice to the unspoken and hidden aspects of maternal experience: the drudgery and repetitious nature of childcare, the anxiety, the boredom and tiredness, the bitching and the judgements, the internalised rage. As Simic writes:

Simic stages Medea with objects, texts and images from the toddler group bringing this ancient Greek play into a startling dialogue with these working class Liverpool mothers. Indeed, her first performance of

Medea/Mothers Clothes is for the toddler group

mothers. A central element of performance of Medea/Mothers'

Clothes is Simic's washing of clothes given to her by the mothers, wringing them out and hanging

them to dry. There is something terrible about the endless cycle of maternal labour that repeated scenes of hand washing invoke.

But there is also an incredible intimacy in this activity, the washing of the mothers' clothes as an act of love. A metaphor for Medea/Mothers' Clothes itself—a performance that is gifted to the mothers in the audience.

Each mother tries to cover up her insecurity by presenting herself in the most positive light within the communal toddler group environment. The secrets about the 'real' experience of motherhood soon start emerging through intimate confessions, chats and teas. A new darker side of motherhood slowly seeps out.
Simic on Medea/Mothers' Clothes

* Imogen Tyler lectures in sociology at Lancaster University with a primary research interest in the intersections of gender, race, and class in the formation of bodies and identities (intersectionality).

Medea/Mothers' Clothes draws on experience as a means of rallying against the ideologies of 'ideal motherhood' which haunt maternal lives.

As Simic
notes:

The performance draws on the figure Medea as a means of critiquing, trans-coding and rebelling against prescribed maternal ideals...that Mother that smiles at us from Boots and Mothercare catalogues; who gazes at us from NHS education leaflets about pregnancy, birth and parenthood.
Simic on Medea/Mothers' Clothes



Untitled still from video footage Medea/Mothers' Clothes

Contemplation Time: A Document of Maternity Leave (2007 - 2008)

consists of the written and visual documentation of 32 visits by Simic and her newborn baby, Sid, to a local park and a specific park bench between 5 July 2007 and 27 April 2008. During these visits Simic, in her words, 'performs or gets baby Sid to perform' for the camera. This notion of motherhood as performance is central to Simic's understanding and development of a maternal aesthetic. Everyday motherhood restaged as a performance which might reveal maternal truths and secrets: the codes, structures and relations of power at stake. This 'mimicry' of real maternal practices is one of Simic's central critical strategies. In *Contemplation Time* this performance of maternity, reveals that motherhood is never a property but always a relation between subjects: a relation between Lena, Sid, the camera, the bench, pram, props. Maternity is a process and a practice which is not distinct from the work of the artist, but is on the contrary enabling of life and art. Thus Simic describes the visits to the park as 'the artistic process of me getting on with my life as a mother and as an artist', a sentence which like so many of Simic's is both transparent and a loaded political statement - a statement of will:

I will be both a mother and an artist, I am artist-mother.



Untitled photograph from *Contemplation Time*

Sid Jonah Anderson by Lena Simic

was staged in March 2008 as a part of MAP Live event at Source Café in Carlisle. It was composed of a live art performance in which Simic went through Sid's bedtime routine. As Simic notes:

The live action on stage consisted of performing the daily routine with Sid: bathing, dressing, feeding, laying down to sleep. This very banal everyday action was heightened through its staging. My movements on stage were quite sharp, neat and timed. Props were arranged and the performance space was highly organized. Additionally, the action was complemented by audio-visual footage: extracts from my diary and photographs from my walks in the park.
Simic on Sid Jonah Anderson by Lena Simic 2008



Untitled photograph from publicity still for Sid Jonah Anderson by Lena Simic (2008)

Sid Jonah Anderson by Lena Simic (2008) draws for inspiration on a live art performance by Léa Lublin (1929-1999), a Paris based conceptual artist who exhibited a piece called **Mon Fils** in May 1968, in which she and her seven-month-old son Nicholas moved into the Musée d' Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris. Like Lublin, Simic's aim is to trouble private/public binaries. As the title of this piece, ' Sid Jonah Anderson by Lena Simic (2008) suggests, this is a political aesthetic in which the woman-mother is a public subject, she refuses to be privatised (see Tyler, 2009). Simic's work is concerned with what within maternal experience resists capitalization. In this respect her work is concerned with the political potentiality of **the maternal as the unmarketable**.

Simic called her two Sid projects 'Maternal Matters' concerned as they are with the everyday, routine and often banal aspects of maternal labour. 'Maternal Matters' has other resonances. 'Matter' derives from the Latin mater meaning origin and of course mother. To matter is to take form, to become palpable. In the 1970s the philosopher Luce Irigaray traced the disavowal of what she termed 'mother-matter' within the history of European thought and representation. Irigaray called for a revolution to challenge this foundational matricide, a representational insurrection which would transform the relationship between matter and form, so that mother-matter might come to matter. Through careful staging, performance, figuration and representation Simic forces a critical valuation of the maternal - she makes it matter:

"The elevation of the domestic activity from its everyday routine to its stage presence... This is my call for adventure" Maternal Matters!

Factory Floor

www.factoryfloor.org

* by Abi Lake

Factory Floor is a creative network for women solo performers/writers - a forum for exploring, sharing and testing solo work and discussion in a supportive environment. We meet 3 - 4 times a year, taking it in turns to host and facilitate a weekend workshop. We are largely self-sufficient, but have also received support from Lancaster University, Chichester University, University of Glamorgan, Liverpool Hope University and Anglia Ruskin University.

Founded in 2006, following a series of free AHRC funded workshops at Lancaster University entitled 'Women's Writing for Performance', Factory Floor was the result of someone's suggestion (was it Lena? Was it in the bar of the Nuffield over a whisky?!) to continue meeting in this sort of workshop environment that we had all found so productive. We exchanged email addresses, and set a date to meet later in the summer, and use the university's facilities that were open to us then. We have functioned in much the same way ever since, using the space and occasional financial contributions that our working relationships with (largely educational) establishments can provide. We all have our separate academic and creative projects and related areas of enquiry, but we come together to spend a weekend working in the same space. It would seem there is an absolute necessity and creative luxury in setting aside a time and space to focus on your own creative work, or have a deadline to show a work-in-progress. To do this along with other women of various backgrounds, but separate

from the pressure of funding deadlines or academic criteria has proved invaluable to the development of our individual creative processes. 'A Room of One's Own', without the isolation!

We test ideas, discuss and show work, share skills and information, and receive peer group feedback to help us develop our practice. We also have great lunch break picnics! What began as a largely work based relationship has of course also become social, in the tradition of the residential style workshops where we first met, but perhaps with more longevity, as we are self-organising and all so personally invested in the work that we produce within Factory Floor.

Our discussions and the work we produce is as varied as the mix of people and lives within the group, but there is a solid sense of a shared context of working and socialising as women creative practitioners in a self-sustained environment which supports our working processes.

Factory Floor currently has 7 members based throughout the UK:

Abi Lake
Caroline Wilson
Clare Duffy
Emily Underwood
Kerstin Bueschges
Lena Simic
Louie Jenkins

Our workshop meetings so far:

the Bluecoat, Liverpool, November 2009
University of Chichester, September 2009
Anglia Ruskin University, Cambridge, May 2009
Liverpool Hope University, February 2009
PWC Manchester, November 2008
Anglia Ruskin University, May 2008
PWC Manchester, November 2007
Liverpool Hope University, June 2007
Glamorgan University, April 2007
University of Chichester, November 2006
Lancaster University, July 2006

* Abi Lake is an artist and performer, currently based in Manchester. She is co-founder of Scarlet Letter Performance Company and a member of the Factory Floor creative network for solo women writers/performers.



Masha Serghyeevna

Solo
Performance

2009

The Bluecoat
Liverpool, UK



**The Institute
for the Art and Practice
of Dissent at Home**

Home-run art activist
initiative, run out of
the spare room
of a council house

2007 - present

Everton,
Liverpool, UK

www.twoaddthree.org

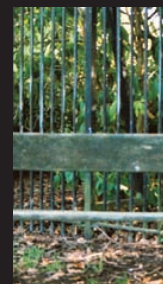


**Sid Jonah Anderson
by Lena Simic**

Live Art Event

2008

MAP Live
Source Café
Carlisle, UK



**Contemplati
A Document
Maternity Le**

Text and pho

2007 - 08

Sefton Park,
Liverpool, UK

Arts Projects 2004

www.lenasimic.org



on Time:
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tographs

Joan Trial

Solo Performance

2005 - 07

Nuffield Theatre

Lancaster, UK 2005

ShowRoom

University of Chichester,
UK 2006

Leeds Met Studio Theatre
UK 2006

Cornerstone Festival

Liverpool Hope University,
UK 2006

Stories to be Told

Transit festival, Odin Teatret,
Denmark 2007

National Review of Live Art
Glasgow, UK 2007

www.joantrial.org

Magdalena Makeup

Live Art Event

2004 - 2006

Karantena

Multimedia Arts Festival,
Art Workshop Lazareti,
Dubrovnik, Croatia 2004

Old Police Station

Lark Lane Community Centre,
Liverpool, UK 2004

A performative paper

'The Articulate Practitioner –
Articulating Practice' forum,
Aberystwyth, UK 2005 and
'Diasporic Futures:

Women, the Arts and
Globalization' conference,
Victoria and Albert Museum,
London, UK 2006

www.magdalenamakeup.org

Medea/Mothers' Clothes

Live Art Event and
Performance Research

2004 - 2007

Bluecoat Arts Centre

Liverpool, UK 2004

emergency, greenroom
Manchester, UK 2004

Brunel University

London, UK 2004

'Magdalena Sin Fronteras'

festival, Teatro Guiñol, Santa
Clara, Cuba 2005

InterUniversity Centre

Dubrovnik, Croatia 2005

Performance Art Carlisle Event

Source Café,
Carlisle, UK 2006

John Thaw Studio Theatre

Manchester University,
UK 2006

Medea: Mutations and Permutations of a Myth

interdisciplinary conference,
Bristol University, UK 2006

On the Edge

University of Hull @
Scarborough, UK 2006

University of Winchester

UK 2007

www.medeamotherstclothes.org

- 2009

On Medea/Mothers' Clothes: A "Foreigner" Re-figuring Medea and Motherhood

* by Lena Simic

Medea/Mothers' Clothes is a critical and yet, through the use of ritual-like repetitious action of washing, a sensual response to my own experiences of motherhood. The performance aims to sensually create a new space amongst and between the participants; my first audience is the mothers from the toddler groups.

The set display consists of a washing line stretching from one side of the space to the other, with two garments hanging on it on two different sides: purple, somewhat theatrical Medea's costume and a white sheet. There are lots of colourful clothes piled up on the floor as well as a bottle of baby shampoo. All of these clothes were given to me by the Liverpool mothers participating in the project. I enter the stage carrying my children's baby bath, full of water. I wet the white sheet and hang it back onto the washing line. I operate the slide projector, focused onto the wet dripping sheet. We see changing slides of mothers' faces on a wet dripping sheet. The portrait photos that I took during our toddler group session. I operate the DVD and video projector, focused onto the white screen in the background of the stage. We see images of myself in the Medea costume with my children whilst hanging out the clothes on my housing estate, cleaning the mirror in my bedroom and putting on mothers' clothes. We hear two Medea monologues from Euripides' play, sounds from toddler group and Stabat Mater music.

One of the Medea monologues makes use of a foreign language a central methodological tool in the creation of the performance. I make Medea's improper acquisition of foreign language visible. During the rehearsal period of Euripides' monologues, I asked my Liverpool husband Gary Anderson to help me with learning my lines and prompting me if necessary. This exercise became an important component of my performance. I decided to use Gary's strong prompting voice as a way to give patriarchal authority over me as his wife, a foreigner and an actress. My 'speech impediment' in the performance is evident through the recorded sound footage of Gary prompting me my lines and correcting my English. This dialogue became my comment on the supposedly inferior position of a barbarian Woman. Medea, our barbarian, with my 'nuanced English' is prompted lines by her author Euripides, contemporary society, and finally, my husband's Scouse accent. I enter into a dialogue with this directorial voice, subverting its authority through interruption and laughter; I speak Euripides' words ironically and scornfully and expose a political, agentic rebellious Medea which in turn enabled a challenge to the myth's own figuration within the community as an alien other, as a 'foreign mother'.



Medea/Mothers' Clothes still from video

Situated in the middle of the stage with my children's baby bath, I perform the task of washing and hanging previously collected mothers' clothes. A Mother's work is never done. I am quietly humming nursery rhymes 'A sailor went to sea, sea, sea' and a Croatian children's song 'Ja sam gusar s Porporele' ('I am a pirate from Porporela'). The elevation of the domestic activity from its everyday routine to its stage presence, gives me, a real woman, a space to challenge the patriarchal representations of myself as Woman/Mother/Housewife/Foreigner. This is my call for adventure, my escape. The smell of baby bath fills the performing space. The water splashes. The performer gets wet in it. After all the mothers' clothes had been washed, I wet Medea's costume and put it on. I leave the stage. All is dripping wet.

Overtime the materials which constitute this performance, the audio-visual footage, the mothers' slides, the objects, have become documents laden with maternal memory. Representing a past time when I was faced with the joys and difficulties of motherhood within my adopted Liverpool community. Over the three years of performing the piece, I have watched my children grow and the mothers in the slides have passed out of my everyday life. However, the urgency to perform the piece and go back to it has stayed with me. For whilst Medea/Mothers' Clothes was created with a specific audience in mind (the Liverpool mothers) it strives to be re-performed, recreated, in new places for it speaks to longer transnational secret histories of maternal experience.

Medea/Mothers' Clothes still from video



This is a shortened version of the article 'On Medea/Mothers' Clothes: A "Foreigner" Re-figuring Medea and Motherhood' written for a special edition 'On Birth' in the journal *Feminist Review*, 2009.

Locating the Maternal

* by Paula McCloskey

Lena's performances are concerned with an interventionist feminist art practice that uses everyday experience and autobiography. As the mother of three young boys much of her everyday is concerned with the maternal. The maternal then, is a recurring theme in her work. This is particularly present in **Medea/Mothers' Clothes**, **Contemplation Time** and **Sid Jonah Anderson** by **Lena Simic**. Each uses her maternal experience to question contemporary assumptions of motherhood.

Maternity is not a new area of interest for artists or thinkers and others, it has had an enduring place in art, philosophy and science, traversing all disciplines and fields. Maternity has been interpreted and re-interpreted throughout history and across cultures. Maternity has been particularly enthusiastically represented in the visual art world, but until relatively recently women artists have rarely been creators of such work.

In the Western world after the Second World War there was a questioning of the very assumption of 'women's work' as women began to acknowledge that maternity was central to understanding their subordination and oppression. Women started to challenge ideologies or myths of maternity, and began to explore their own maternal experience. There was a concomitant shift in the visual arts in which women artists responded to this changing category of maternity in society by recuperating the maternal from mostly male depictions of the Madonna and child that had littered the art world:

Women do however, create art. In particular, since the 1960s there has been a cacophony of art works produced that seek to explore the lived experience of motherhood, and reconfigure maternity through art practice. Such work has explored topics such as the transformation that occurs with pregnancy and childbirth, to exploring childlessness, miscarriage, being mothered, assisted reproduction, the task of mothering, and abortion, to name a few. The works created by women about their experiences are thus diverse and evocative and cover all areas of arts practice (such as Mary Kelly, Paula Rego, Helen Chadwick, Ellen McMahon, Sarah Pucill, Léa Lublin, Mierle Laderman Ukeles, Christine Wilks, Whitney McVeigh, Frida Kahlo, Kiki Smith, Louise Bourgeois, Helen Sargeant, Cindy Sherman, Helen Knowles, Judy Glantzman, Monica Bock, Sarah Webb, Renée Cox, Deirdre Donoghue, Helena Walsh, Anna Furse, Hannah Wilke, Tracy Emin). Lena's work on maternity is in the company of these and other women artists who have used their art practice to explore and interrogate maternal experiences and subjectivity and to dispel naturalised or essentialist ideas of motherhood.

As mothers, as daughters, as artists, but most of all as women we all have a stake in displacing the bio-maternal determinism that lies hidden in the seemingly benign representations of maternity. Women artists have always worked in a Catch-22 situation and the catch is maternity an 'original' division of labor: women have babies: men create art

Isaak 1996: 140

The interest in maternity by women artists continues to hold strong. New generations of artists are exploring their lived experiences in a world where, although the context of maternity might be changing, it still challenges us all socially, politically and culturally in our everyday lives. It would seem that maternity is many things; a dynamic concept, a transformative experience, a relation that we all share, but what it is not is a 'problem' to be solved. With this in mind, women artists will of course continue to explore maternity in innovative ways that challenges us and force us to thought.

* Paula McCloskey - researcher, writer, mother, artist. Sheffield, UK

A Performative Response

* by Kerstin Bueschges



I am from Dubrovnik.

My name is Magdalena, after my grandmother, and inspired by my name, I assume Mary Magdalene's Biblical status as a penitent whore and stage encounters between you and me.

Witness the process of my transformation into Mary Magdalene in Dubrovnik, always my other home. I am offering you an audio-visual individual encounter with my 'Other' culture. I bring you a bit of 'Other'.

I possess perfumed ointment contained in an alabaster jar. I smell divine. I have marked my space with cloth and odour. I anoint your feet. Experience the contemplative and tangible space of a Biblical ritual. Beware, this is a contemporary experiential enactment.

I have constructed myself as an object of desire. I invite your gaze upon me. I touch. I am foreign and sensual. I am making myself up for you.

Pay me a visit.

Call 07963769108 to book your private session. Limited availability

Text from the back of the Magdalena Makeup post card/flyer.

I'm invited into a small, shabby, somewhat dirty looking room by a woman who simply points towards a chair in front of a desk. I reluctantly take my seat, feeling a little unsettled by the fact that she remains behind me. The woman is wearing a red silk dress and a blond wig, her lips are bright red. The lipstick is smudged, as if she didn't take care when applying it. Or maybe too many lips have already passed over this colour. Her eyes are red and sore, as if she's been crying through the night. Though this is most likely my romanticised version of events rather than reality. Perhaps it's simply due to too much rubbing or tiredness. She speaks in a foreign tongue, making me feel uneasy. I turn my gaze to the video of the same woman in a different country. She flirts with the camera, with me. She seems more erotically charged in the video than in real life. Our eyes meet at the screen and suddenly I'm aware that at this point I'm sandwiched between her two gazes. It's not me she's looking at. I'm only the substance between, the vehicle through which these two gazes embrace. The flirting isn't aimed at me but her other. They are playing a game with each other. 'Look at me! I'm free, enjoying the sea breeze in my hair. Look at my body moving with ease on this boat. And look at you! Behind those strangers, in a world where you don't speak their language. Scooped up in this dirty, dark room.' But the other one is not backing down. 'But I'm real! I'm actually here! I'm living! You're simply an image of me! Freedom?! Your freedom ends within the frame of the camera. It ends with me pressing a button.' I don't press any buttons, but the video ends nevertheless. The image that sticks in my mind is the smiling, flirting woman on the boat. Flirting with whom? Suddenly I become acutely aware of the figure behind me as she approaches, uttering words I cannot decipher, though this unfamiliarity starts to grow on me, starts to draw me in, relax me. It's like an unfamiliar sound that trickles ever so slightly in the background. She kneels in front of me, beckons me to bare my feet. This part remains blurred. I remember an unfamiliar smell coming from the ground. I remember her dipping her fingers in oil, or did she pour it into her hand and gently massaging it into my feet. I remember her using the hair of her wig to clean my feet. By this point, I've already given in, let her take hold of me, take control of me, given over to relaxation and some kind of guilty pleasure in her touch. The end is as unceremonious as the beginning. She simply stands up, opens the door and waits until I've gathered my belongings and left the space. The door closes behind me. I'm left standing barefoot outside her presence in a strange, cold and dirty space.

* Kerstin Bueschges, currently working at Anglia Ruskin University, is an active practitioner, academic and pedagogue with a research interest in representations of femininity and the affect of temporality on autobiographical materiality in live/performance art.

On Tactical Self-Sufficiency and Provisional Spaces: Medea/Mothers' Clothes

* by Cathy Butterworth

In 2004 the Bluecoat, Liverpool's combined arts centre, was host to more than 40 different Live Art¹ events that took place across 100 days of activity. The venue has played a significant role in programming and commissioning Live Art in the UK for over four decades and 2004 proved to be an interesting year in the arts centre's relationship to performative practice. The number and diversity of projects that took place at the Bluecoat during that year pushed the organisation to the limits of its capacity in terms of delivering events, attracting audiences and, most importantly for this discussion, providing differing and appropriate levels of support for the array of artists who worked with the venue. Discussions around the role of the performance programmer have developed in an attempt to articulate the diversity of functions that the title implies in relation to support for Live Art practice. In line with this there has been a rise in the use of the term 'producer' along with the development of a discourse suggesting that programmers have an increasingly collaborative role to play in the creation and delivery of artists' projects. This inclination, to position the programmer central to artists' creativity, is problematic, not because of a lack of basis to the assertion that programmers and curators work with artists on a creative level, but because if unchallenged this sort of discourse reduces the autonomy with which artists are able to negotiate the useful context that the term Live Art provides.

It is against this backdrop and with this issue in mind that I want to consider aspects of Lena Simic's practice, with specific reference to *Medea/Mothers' Clothes*, a project that she presented at the Bluecoat in 2004.

Medea/Mothers' Clothes took place as live performances at the Bluecoat on 30 April and 1 May 2004 followed by, from 1 until 6 May, an installation in the same performance space. In drawing out a number of factors relating to the conditions of its production I want to highlight Simic's negotiation of the Bluecoat as a provisional and contingently

autonomous space, a tactic which I believe offers a useful framework for understanding the potentiality of Live Art.

Drawing on Simic's everyday lived experiences, *Medea/Mothers' Clothes* is an autobiographical investigation of motherhood and a critique of accepted normative discourse that surrounds this role. In the piece Simic employs the Medea figure, not as a character to perform or represent, but as an abstracted entity to juxtapose with her own lived experiences, and the experiences of the 19 women who originally participated in the project, personally known to the artist through the two toddler groups in Liverpool that she attended, with her sons, at this time. *Medea/Mothers' Clothes* includes material gathered from Simic's performance journals, filmed footage of everyday activity such as shopping, washing and eating meals, sound recordings of the artist performing monologues from Euripides' *Medea* and portraits of the 19 mothers, along with an item of clothing given to the artist by each of them, for inclusion in the performance and installation.

Given that the material for the project is largely autobiographical, gathered from daily experiences situated in and around the artist's home and focussed on her connection with the women who attended the toddler groups, it would be easy to argue for the piece to have been sited in a space closer to that community rather than in a city centre arts venue. However, in '(Dis) Identifying Female Archetypes in Live Art'², Simic points to the reasons why it was important for the piece to be presented at the Bluecoat. First, it gave the artist the opportunity to work with her material in a Live Art context, opening up the possibilities for intervening in the Medea myth beyond its more traditional theatre context. Second, citing the venue as the conceptual framework for the project allowed Simic to enter the toddler groups 'publicly, as an artist' and afforded her 'the freedom to start seeing the mothers differently'. So, the Bluecoat provided an important reference point throughout the development of the piece, despite the artist not

* Cathy Butterworth was Live Art Programmer at the Bluecoat from 2000-2005 and is currently writing a PhD that considers the development of Live Art in the UK. Live Art¹ and Live Art² - footnotes explained on last page

needing to use the venue as a rehearsal or production space due to most of that process taking place in and around where she lived.

That Simic was able to utilise the Bluecoat and its programme as an important, but not imposing, context for *Medea/Mothers' Clothes*, meant that the project was able to operate with the autonomy of a touring work, while resonating with the organisation and the space. The relative proximity of the venue to the area of Liverpool where the toddler groups take place afforded the immediate audience for the piece (the 19 women who contributed to the project) an experience of the performances and the installation as constituents of a community rather than individual audience members, while giving them the space to view it outside of the nuanced context of the toddler groups. This coupled with the simple fact of the venue having a rather idiosyncratic performance space that bore little resemblance to a black box theatre, allowed for this first production of the piece to be experienced more as a sited work with the Bluecoat acting as a useful and provisional representation of the complex spaces, the home environment and the toddler groups, explored by the artist in developing the project.

Among the number and diversity of artists who worked with the Bluecoat in 2004 I would argue that, in terms of articulating Live Art as a sustainable constructive conceptual space for artists, Lena Simic was one of the most successful. Sharon Smith, Rebecca Reid and Sandra Johnston were among other artists developing performances for the Bluecoat that year and working in similarly innovative and complex ways, recognising the possibilities for artists to work self-sufficiently, without an imposed curatorial thematic or producer's input, while feeling able to rely on a venue to provide robust support and a resonant site for their performative practice.

In the problematically titled publication 'The Producers: Alchemists of the Impossible', Helen Cole, former Live Art Programmer at Arnolfini, Bristol, states: 'As producer, it is my job [...] to spot the possibilities, to listen to the dreaming, to replay the thinking, until the work takes shape and becomes real.'

In arguing for the continued potentiality for Live Art as a productive term for artists it is becoming increasingly important to look more closely at the performative tactics of those such as Lena Simic whose work provides resistance to the increasing overstatement of the role of the programmer, and who are more than willing and capable of maintaining a rigorous and inspired practice of their own volition.

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www.liveartuk.org
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The Producers:
Alchemists of the Impossible
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Sharon Smith Website
www.maxfactory.org.uk
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¹ My use of the term Live Art takes into account the breadth of performative practice understood to be associated with that definition in a UK context, while acknowledging both the tactical mutability of the term and the inherent problems and complications associated with its development as the description of an art form. It is also coterminous with Lena Simic's definition of 'Live Art' with particular reference to *Medea/Mothers' Clothes* as discussed in her PhD research, '(Dis) Identifying Female Archetypes in Live Art'. I have chosen to capitalise the term Live Art throughout the text for clarity and consistency, and this also relates to my broader research concerned with a 're-positioning' of Live Art across a number of operational contexts.

² Lena Simic's PhD thesis '(Dis) Identifying Female Archetypes in Live Art' provides a theoretical framework for the three performance projects that comprise the artist's PhD research, *Medea/Mothers' Clothes*, *Magdalena Makeup* and *Joan Trial*.

AN EXTRACT FROM JOAN TRIAL PERFORMANCE TEXT

*Anđele moj mali
moj čuvaru blagi
budi tebi hvala
sto me čuvas malu
čuvaj me dok živim
da ti ništa ne skrivim*

As a child, I was often bored during Mass. I'd watch St Michael, the archangel, above the church altar. He's fighting Lucifer. He's got his foot on Lucifer's head. And he's got a spear. This is Sveti Mihajlo church in Dubrovnik, Croatia. I imagine what it's like fighting with him - him an archangel, me one of his angels. Then I think about Lucifer, the fallen angel, the one that was loved by God the most. But let me stick with God's favourite: St Michael.

Left Left

Left Left Left

We are kneeling. It hurts. When will we stand up again?

Left Left

Left Left Left

Kneeling again. Soon is Our Father, the communion, the end.

Left Left

Left Left Left

Aged five, I was chosen to head the town procession for Tito, our beloved president. I was wearing the second T in his name T I T O. The red T was attached to my white top with some safety pins.

Left Left

Left Left Left

I wrote to Tito in hospital. I was six when he died. I was a member of young socialist Pioneers. I wore a red scarf and a blue hat with a red star. Yugoslavia dissolved before I was old enough to join the proper Communist party.

Left Left

Yugoslavia consisted of six republics: Slovenia, Croatia, Montenegro, Macedonia, Serbia with its autonomous regions of Vojvodina and Kosovo, and finally, Bosnia & Herzegovina, which witnessed the bloodiest conflicts in the recent Yugoslav war.

Left Left Left

Bosnia & Herzegovina consists of three nationalities and three religions: Bosnian Muslims, Orthodox Serbs and Catholic Croats.

slowly **Left Left**

Left Left Left

There is a little village in Bosnia and Herzegovina called Medjugorje. Medjugorje is a holy site. Apparently the Virgin Mary has been appearing there for the last twenty odd years.

Left

Dubrovnik, my hometown is three hours away, when travelling by car. Dubrovnik, a famous medieval town, attracts tourists. Medjugorje attracts pilgrims. Often they are combined as a packaged tour: tourists become pilgrims and vice versa.

Left Left

The Virgin Mary has been around for some twenty odd years. From

'before the war'. The holy children, who were only around ten when they first saw her, are now older than me, and I am thirty. Some of them don't see the Virgin Mary anymore.

Left Left

Left Left Left

I lean on my left leg, pointing to the sky with my arms

Before the war, I wanted to be one of those children. I wanted to see things. Once, in Medjugorje, aged nine, with my Mum and grandparents, I saw signs. A sun that changes colour and a crucifix on the hill was slowly turning round and round.

I spent the day walking barefoot up the sacred hill.

One of the pilgrims called out: 'Look! Look at the colours on the asphalt!'

And another one said: 'Oh no, it's nothing. Only petrol spillage.'

We are all so hungry for miracles.

Kneeling down, hands in prayer, slow movement into wings.



MASHA SERGHYEEVNA

PERFORMANCE TEXT

I walk on stage and I fall in love.

Waltz by Strauss comes on.

I don't dance.

Instead, I look at all the audience members.

I remember wearing black and putting on lipstick.

CUE 1: Audience lights.

I sit on the chair upstage left, dressed as a SOLDIER waiting for the audiences to arrive.

CUE 2: General cover, when audience ready.

I set up the chair in the middle of the stage, switch on the microphone upstage right, with words Left, left, left, left, left, and return to my starting position upstage left.

PROLOGUE

The SOLDIER character opens and closes the performance.

Choreographed movement (arms to the right, arms spread out, right arm up).

CUE 3: Focus on microphone light, other lights can be dimmed when I come to the microphone.

SOLDIER *speaking into the microphone:* It's exactly 15 years since I met her. It was autumn. I remember it was very cold and it was snowing. We met at a party, the turn of the century, all black clothes and champagne. She was wearing a red dress, sleeveless, tight, simple. She was very young, 19, I think. She was eager. Yes, it might have been a bit chilly for that dress, but no one said anything. It was raining hard, raining and snowing.

The clock struck twelve. The party was good; there was plenty of food left. Lots of people: Andrey, Masha, Natasha, Irene, Olga, Vershinin, the whole *Three Sisters* cast. It was peacetime back then. Lots of beds to sleep in, clean sheets, warm. She left.

Someone said she joined the 1905 Russian Revolution. She was there at the Winter Palace for Bloody Sunday; she joined in the strikes, protests and demonstrations. She came to Odessa uprising and supported the crew from the Battleship Potemkin. She wrote for *the Iskra*. Later she joined the Bolsheviks.

They met in the battle, the Balkan Wars, 1912.

He was blood-shod and calling her name.

All went lame; all blind;

Drunk with fatigue...

She held him in her arms – they say.

He said nothing.

She saw him drowning.

She pressed her body against him – they say.

She had a red dress on. And lipstick.

She must have looked rather out of place..

Blood. Lots of noise, artillery.

He died. She walked away.

She did marry eventually, to an officer.

She was just one of those people who couldn't stay single. Two children.

When I saw her the other morning, I wanted to say something along the lines of how wonderful she looked that autumn, in 1901, and how those were the parties and the times and the youth, but it felt a bit odd.



Her husband has been relocated with the army. It is wartime, big time, it is 1916. The children are with her. She is still beautiful, better looking than ever I think.

I know we will meet again. I did write to her, but she never responded. I think she will in a year or two – when her own life becomes intolerable again. She said she had just one longing and it seemed to grow stronger and stronger. Things are just ripe for the revolution, she said.

CUE 4: General cover when I start taking off my helmet.

PLAY TRACK 1: Pre-recorded poem 'Dulce et Decorum Est' by war poet Wilfred Owen, when I cross to downstage left and turn back facing the audience.

Dulce et Decorum Est

Bent double, like old beggars under sacks,
Knock-kneed, coughing like hags, we cursed through sludge,
Till on the haunting flares we turned our backs
And towards our distant rest began to trudge.
Men marched asleep. Many had lost their boots
But limped on, blood-shod. All went lame; all blind;
Drunk with fatigue; deaf even to the hoots
Of tired, outstripped Five-Nines that dropped behind.

Gas! Gas! Quick, boys! - An ecstasy of fumbling,
Fitting the clumsy helmets just in time;
But someone still was yelling out and stumbling
And flound'ring like a man in fire or lime...
Dim, through the misty panes and thick green light,
As under a green sea, I saw him drowning.

In all my dreams, before my helpless sight,
He plunges at me, guttering, choking, drowning.

If in some smothering dreams you too could pace
Behind the wagon that we flung him in,
And watch the white eyes writhing in his face,
His hanging face, like a devil's sick of sin;
If you could hear, at every jolt, the blood
Come gargling from the froth-corrupted lungs,
Obscene as cancer, bitter as the cud

Of vile, incurable sores on innocent tongues,-
My friend, you would not tell with such high zest
To children ardent for some desperate glory,
The old Lie: Dulce et decorum est
Pro patria mori.

Scattering letters across the stage. Taking off my soldier's uniform, revealing the red dress underneath. Putting on my dancing shoes. Creating a battlefield. Choreographed movement centre stage: revealing my leg, slight movement backwards, right arm up.

Scene 1:

Intro to the three characters: Girl from the Prologue, Masha Serghyeevna and Lena

GIRL FROM THE PROLOGUE: Hello. I am that eager girl from the Prologue, the one that the soldier talked about. I move through the battlefields. I take care of the soldiers' letters. I take care of the dying men in battle. I meet up with revolutionaries. I wear lipstick. Red dress. I am all for an uprising and change. I was at the 1905 Russian Revolution, the Balkan Wars, the Great War, the 1917 Russian Revolution: February and October... *pause* ...more recently the Yugoslav war. I am also from the future.

Upstage left, playing with the black ribbon.

MASHA: Good evening. My name is Masha Serghyeevna and I am a character from Chekhov's play *The Three Sisters*. This performance is set after Chekhov. I am the middle one of *The Three Sisters*. I am married and I am beautiful. I am a flirt. I am quick to fall in love. I am quick to flirt and kiss. I am not to be confused with that eager girl from the Prologue, the one that the soldier talked about.

Tying black ribbon around my waist. Going towards the jacket, playing with it. Arm high up, hugging my face with the jacket.

I have fallen in love. Vershinin, the guy, is married with two kids. He's an army officer, a melancholic and a bit keen on philosophizing. A bit of a 'poet-officer' type thing. Vershinin and I are having an affair: it's passionate and quick. It is 1901, the turn of the century, I am 25, maybe 26. At the end of the play Vershinin will leave me for another war. The

troops were sent somewhere a long way off. Some years later, he will probably get killed in the Great War, if not the Russian Revolution.

I put the jacket over my face. An awkward pause. Then, civil tone, centre stage.

LENA: Hi. My name is Lena and I want this performance to include dance. It's autumn and I like to dance in autumn.

PLAY TRACK 2: Strauss 1

Dance to the Strauss 'Waltz'.

My friend Antonija came up with this dance routine. We were 15; it was just before our own war, the Yugoslav war, the one that undid the Russian Revolution, the one in the 1990s, the civil war, the one which ended socialism. We danced in fishnets and underwear back then, aged 15. I am 34 now so I am not gonna do that. Antonija is 34 as well. She is a proper actor in a proper theatre now. She lives in Zagreb. I am a performance artist. I live in Liverpool. I may be proper as well.

For our dance routine, when we were 15, fishnets and underwear, just before our Yugoslav war and the end of socialism, we didn't use Strauss' 'Waltz', we used George Michael's 'Father Figure', because that was in back then. I am not sure how relevant that is now, in relation to this performance, so I mixed it with an Italian anarcho-communist band CCCP - which means USSR, the whole Chekhov/Russian connection - I used to be mad about them when I was 19, like that eager girl from the Prologue, all for an uprising and change. So dance-wise from George Michael and being 15 to CCCP and being 19.

PLAY TRACK 3: George Michael/CCCP.

CUE 5: Spotlight on chair when I sit down/George Michael starts to play.

Antonija chair routine on George Michael.

CUE 6: General cover when I kick the chair/throw it on the ground and CCCP starts playing.

CCCP dance. I finish my dance routine, all huffed up.

Scene 2: Being Masha

LENA: Let's go back to Vershinin and being Masha. Let me take you through the play and its aftermath. The key moments between Masha and Vershinin.

Lying on the floor with my legs spread, back facing the audience – in front of the helmet.

Masha remembers Vershinin:

I remember when I first saw you, you made me pity you. You talked too much.

I remember the spring sunshine.

I remember wearing black and putting on lipstick.

I remember winter nights and wind in the chimney and your wife, absent and dark.

I remember kissing and not wanting to let go.

I remember them taking me away from you.

I remember my little sister watching.

I remember hurting. I remember hurting you.

I remember the pain. You remember nothing at all.

Your letters are too dry. Your letters are quick. Your letters want to fill in the space in me you had, quickly, easily, briefly.

You are moving so that I can keep still.

Remember me.

Turning to lie on my front, legs in the air.

Masha's forgetting Vershinin:

I don't remember your blue gloves. I don't remember your lips. I don't remember the words you said when you killed me. I am forgetting more and more and my mind is in a muddle. I am forgetting your face, your eyes, your lips, your teeth, your feet, your nose, your tongue, your kisses, your... Have you touched me at all? Have you kissed me in all the wrong places?

I don't remember holding hands. I don't remember having sex. I don't remember you telling me about your lover. I don't remember you having a mother. I forgot the way you taste. I forgot the way I used to put my arms around you. I forgot the clumsiness of our love. I forgot we couldn't fit.

I might as well have never met you.

Kneeling. Repetitive bouncy kneeling movement.

Masha and Vershinin are about to say goodbye:
We only have a few hours left. Don't fuck it up now, darling. I know you can, I know you would like to, but please be with me.
I've been reading obituaries lately and I don't know that many dead people. I wonder when that will change.
I don't need to be comforted. Don't need your pity, tears, forgiveness. There must be an easier form of disposal.
We were never meant to be.
I am no longer yours.
I am no longer dedicated to you.
Which war are you fighting? Which army are you in this time?
I am so exhausted by you and I no longer wish I were you, broken you.

Just before he leaves to go off to another war at the end of the play, some words get exchanged between them with a promise of letter writing. See, I couldn't help but wonder if Masha ever wrote those letters to Vershinin. Again, Masha and Vershinin are about to say goodbye, their last scene, a more truthful version.

I perform Masha Vershinin goodbye scene playing with the ribbon.

I wondered where Vershinin had gone and whose war he was fighting. The play was written in 1900, first performance in 1901, it takes four years for action to take place. We are in 1905. The failed Russian Revolution.

I perform Masha Vershinin goodbye scene again.

So, the winter of 2007, I imagined myself Masha and I wrote him letters, beautiful letters sealed with wax. I sent him photographs of myself in sexy underwear. I lusted over him and I lusted for others because of him. This is an exercise in desire. It is the winter of 2007. I have given myself a task to fall in love and write letters about it. I used to find Vershinins all across the country: Liverpool, London, Glasgow, Carlisle, Scarborough, Reading, Winchester, Plymouth, Cambridge, in seedy hotels, in crowded places, at arts events, theatre festivals, conferences, soldiers on the web.

I remember one encounter on the train Liverpool to London: an older guy reading *the Independent* and a thriller novel. He sat next to me. He had a seat reservation. I didn't. I felt I should have moved away. There were too many empty seats available. But I needed to fall in love with him. As I moved away from him, he looked at me and said: You are so kind. That was it.

You are so kind.
Like Masha, I am always looking for someone to fall in love with, on the look out for a quick and superficial fix. Like that girl from the Prologue, I am eager, all for an uprising and change.

All these letters have been returned to me.

I sit down on the chair.

CUE 7: Spotlight on chair when I sit down to read the letters.

Scene 3: Letters

Dear Vershinin,
I am irrationally in love.
He reminds me of a distant lover, someone I lost. Someone whose name I remember every day, but only the name, not him, not his face, not his voice.
Now I'm in love. I watch him in the dark. I watch him as he watches some performance artists doing their weird politics on stage. I watch his body, his pants, his top, his hair, the way he holds himself, his youthful clumsiness, the way he holds a plastic cup of beer in his hand, the way he talks to a girl, the way a girl flirts with him and he smiles.

I imagine us meeting in a B&B in Carlisle.

Dear Vershinin,
The fever is passing. I'm not that much in love anymore.
How's your war? I haven't heard from you in a while. Can you still be bothered? Have you found someone sweeter, younger and happier? Someone less melancholic and carefree? Someone who laughs?

Dear,
I had a dream that I wrote you a letter in which I confessed I was in love with you. I am writing this letter because it feels guilty and emotional. I am writing this letter because I get all flushed. I get that pleasure/pain/guilt feeling in my body. I am writing this letter because writing down your name feels like adultery. In my dream you read the letter I sent you. We met by accident but you were prepared. You said 'We will sort it out'. You were kind and considerate. You were not going to do anything rash and silly. I felt you took such great care of me. We

will sort it out.

Do you have affairs? Do you participate in that kind of human interaction? In such economies?

As I walk down a street in Liverpool I think about you. As I go to work, I think about you. As I find some time alone, I think about you. As I go to bed, I think about you.

An obsessive rhythm of desire.

With affection,

Masha

This letter was addressed to the eager girl from the Prologue. It was written from Cambridge, May 2009. It was unopened when it came back:

You have been consumed with desire. You have been consumed with living through others. Imagining alternative lives. You have been consumed with stealing their happiness. You have been consumed by your constant search. Your glorified war. You have been consumed by your yearning for excitement and adventures and soldiers and death. You are cashing in on their pain. You are unstoppable and eager and too bloody sweet. Your energy is too intense, you are too eager for praise. You have forgotten the notion of justice. You have forgotten all of those right reasons that got you here in the first place.

I place the ribbon around the letters and place them under the chair.

CUE 8: General cover as I get up from the chair.

Scene 4:

Olga, Irene and Natasha vs. Masha

MASHA: Olga! Irene! *pause* Natasha?

Looking at the audience directly, then slight leaning movement backwards.

Have you heard of my sisters, Olga and Irene? Have you heard of Chekhov? You must have heard of Moscow and longing and falling in love and boring husbands and affairs. You must have heard of snow in your hair and dance and wind. You must have heard of women like me, suffocating in marriage made young and enjoying poetry and affairs. And women like Olga whose life revolves around work and migraines.

And girls like Irene whose life will slip away, who see her dreams disappear. I am Masha.

Tying my hair.

LENA: I used to play Natasha, the baddie. Natasha is great – the whole revolution thing with her, getting rid of the decaying aristocracy. She marries Andrey, the brother of the three sisters. She changes everything, just fucks up the house, orders everyone, has an affair in a very straight-forward kind of way, and yet she's such a caring mother. Brutal, bossy, cunning, caring, strict, engagingly boring, nosy, sexy.

MASHA/LENA: Now, I am Masha: beautiful, arty, romantic, melancholic, a bit annoying, depressed, just kind of existing... always ready for affairs, but never for real action... Olga says I am the silliest person in our family.

Playing with the jacket, lying down next to army boots and trousers.

LENA: We all fell for soldiers, all of us, Antonija, Tanja, Marija, Ana, Zorica, Dubravka, me. All aged 17. We all fell for army uniforms, guns and muscles, Ray-Ban glasses, whiskey and Marlboro cigarettes. Socialism fell with beautiful pure brutality. They all looked so smart, these clumsy kids in their brand new flash uniforms, and boots, all suddenly important. All full of masculine charm. We were riding in army jeeps, with lipstick, and later on in the night, we began opening our legs for the very first time.

Movement sequence, like chair dance 'Father Figure' without music, all darker. Movement towards the helmet. Lying on the floor with my legs spread, back facing the audience – in front of the helmet. Turning to lie on my front, legs in the air. Kneeling. Repetitive movement from Scene 2.

Why was I stuck in the wrong war? Why not the proper revolution?

Repeat the sentence, walk around stage getting into: 'I walk on stage.' Choreographed sequence referencing other physical movement from the performance.

Scene 5:

I walk on stage

PLAY TRACK 4: Strauss 2

I walk on stage and I fall in love.
Waltz by Strauss comes on.
I don't dance.
Instead, I look at all the audience members.
I remember wearing black and putting on lipstick.

Finger on lips. Same position as when saying goodbye to Vershinin, more truthful version.

I walk on stage and try to hug someone who is not there.
I walk on stage and try to touch him.
I walk on stage and say: I forgot the way he tastes.

Seductive cheesy dancing on the chair.

I walk on stage and dance.
I walk on stage and seduce you with my dancing.
I walk on stage and become passionate.
I walk on stage and shout: Don't leave me now.
I smile after that.

I walk on stage and I am a soldier.
I walk on stage and this is a battlefield.
I walk on stage and there is blood and lost letters.
I walk on stage and I am that girl from the Prologue.

Movement near touch.

I walk on stage and dream about kissing you.
I walk on stage and kiss with you.
I walk on stage and kiss for ages.

Very civil, talking directly to the audience, choosing one person in the end.

We open the performance with two people kissing on stage, really kissing, like you really really kiss. Each performance is with a different person, so there is no routine.
I walk on stage and say: Good evening. Tonight I am in love.
Meet me later tonight.

Now, I go into the monologue by Masha from Chekhov's play *The Three Sisters*. This is it. This is me playing Masha Serghyeevna.

Semi-improvised, starting and stopping, with several attempts, trying to get it right – breathing into hands over face.

CUE 9: Drop lights.

MASHA¹: My dear sisters, I've got something to confess to you. I must get some relief, I feel the need of it in my heart. I'll confess it to you two alone, and then never again, never to anybody! I'll tell you in a minute.

It's a secret, but you'll have to know everything. I can't keep silent any more.

I'm in love, in love... I love that man... You saw him there just now... well, what's the good? ... I love Vershinin. ...

I thought he was queer at first, then I started to pity him ... then I began to love him ... love everything about him – his voice, his talk, his misfortunes, his two little girls....

He loves me too. It's all rather frightening, isn't it? Not a good thing, is it?

... Oh, my dear! ... How are we going to live through the rest of our lives? What's going to become of us? When you read a novel, everything in it seems so old and obvious, but when you fall in love yourself, you suddenly discover that you don't really know anything, and you've got to make your own decisions. ... My dear sisters, my dear sisters! ... I've confessed it all to you, and now I'll keep quiet. ... I'll be like that madman in the story by Gogol – silence ... silence!

Walking towards the back of the stage.

Scene 6:

Letter about Revolution

LENA: We need to revolutionize this play.

CUE 10: Lights up.

Pick up the bundle of letters. Walking towards the front of the stage.

MASHA¹ - Monologue compiled from Elizaveta Fen translation of *The Three Sisters*, Penguin, 1954.

Vershinin must be dead by now; they must return his possessions, his letters. To hell with officers! The soldier said it was 1916.

In reality, unlike Mahsa, I never fell for anyone older. Never an officer! I never wanted that security. I always wanted young, foolish, badly dressed, penniless idealists, revolutionaries, always my age or even younger than me. Never with a nice car and their own house. Never from Winchester. I was only once in Winchester, performing. Seemed like a terribly boring place. But on the way, on the train, some naughty youths were playing some reggae music on their portable player. I heard a song by *Sublime*, the band from Long Beach that I used to listen to when I was 19. *Sublime* reminded me of an ex-lover and I almost texted him about these naughty youths, reggae, *Sublime* and their snogging on the train... but then the conductor came and told them to switch off their happy music and now the revolution is all gone. The revolution ended in Reading.

In May 2009. I decided I will no longer be falling in love.
At this point I decided I will no longer be accountable for my actions.

Imaginary brick in my hand is a bundle of letters, which will be dropped backwards.

I imagined a girl in a red dress, the girl from the Prologue, Masha in black, Irene in white, Olga in grey, Natasha in colour, walking with a brick in her hand, walking towards the Houses of Parliament. Would you plant a bomb? A girl terrorist. I don't remember much more. I wrote about her in my letter about the revolution, but my letter about the revolution got lost. What happened to my revolution? What happened to all those revolutions? What happened to all those handsome soldiers, from the time when I was 17, what happened to music, what happened to dance, socialism, change, sex, letters and the future? Is this it? *I drop the letters*. I still long for a bomb and the revolution. I spent a day talking to a friend. We sat in a café and talked for four hours straight. She might have been that girl from the Prologue, the one from the future. I commissioned her to write me a letter about revolution.

This is it, the letter about the revolution.

I produce the letter from the jacket, open it and hold it high up. I put on a helmet. I get up on the chair and try to read the letter.

CUE 11: Spotlight on the chair when I get up onto it to read the letter.

CUE 12: General cover when I get down from the chair and start putting on my SOLDIER's uniform.

Vershinin laughed at all of us complaining because we know lots of stuff that's useless. Actually, we learnt to love useless. We, who are against instrumentalization of our time and our thoughts and our life, we who love useless. We who love flowers. It's the flowers that we miss in our lives. We who want to start our lives all over again. We who would not repeat ourselves. We who want flowers and plenty of light. We who are trying to imagine what life will be like after we're dead, say in two or three hundred years. We who live, suffer and work to create the future. We who know that all the happiness is reserved for our descendents, our remote descendents. We who are not happy. We who notice the birds. We who know that our present will be looked at with horror and scorn. We who are full of the tremendous urge to live. We who can see that life is gradually getting easier and brighter, the light will spread everywhere.

EPILOGUE:

To Imagine the Future

PLAY TRACK 5: Pre-recorded poem 'To Imagine' from Bosnian poet/soldier Mirsad Sijarić.

ZAMIŠLJATI

SVIJU NAS JE POGODILA POGIBIJA
POLICAJCA IZ NAŠEG ULAZA
MUŠKARCI SU PUŠILI U KRUG
MAMA JE KOMŠINICI NEŠTO TIHO GOVORILA
U NARUČJU JE DRŽALA MOJU JEDINU PREOSTALU LUTKU
POLICAJČEV PAS JE NJUŠKAO RIBLJU KONZERVU
JEDAN STARIJI GOSPODIN
JE GOVORIO SAM SA SOBOM
I TO KAKO RUSI I AMERIKANCI DOLAZE
KAKO BERLINA VIŠE NEMA
KAKO SE NIKO NEĆE SPASITI
JA USTAJEM
VRTIM SE OKO SEBE
ZAMIŠLJAM DA SAM ZEMLJA

TO IMAGINE

WE HAVE ALL BEEN STRUCK BY THE DEATH
OF THE POLICEMAN FROM OUR BLOCK
MEN STOOD SMOKING IN A CIRCE
MY MUM WAS TALKING QUIETLY TO HER NEIGHBOUR
IN HER ARMS SHE WAS HOLDING THE ONLY DOLL I HAD LEFT
THE POLICEMAN'S DOG WAS SNIFFING AT A TIN OF FISH
ONE ELDERLY GENTLEMAN
WAS TALKING TO HIMSELF
SAYING HOW THE RUSSIANS AND AMERICANS WERE COMING
HOW BERLIN HAD ALREADY FALLEN
HOW NO ONE WILL GET SAVED
I GET UP
SPIN ROUND
IMAGINING I AM THE EARTH

CUE 13: Focus on microphone light, other lights can be dimmed –
when I get to the microphone.

SOLDIER *speaking into the microphone:* She did write in the end. 1917
and things have become intolerable again.

She said she remembered everything, back in 1901, the red dress, the
clean sheets, food and champagne. In detail. She remembered Masha,
Vershinin and the rest. This time she just wanted to hold my hand and
let us imagine things. The future. Our sufferings may mean happiness
for the people who come after us.

She needed me to keep on breathing. To be to be to be.

She said she was convinced we would never be forgotten. She said
that nothing would have been in vain. There will be a time when peace
and happiness reign in the world and then we shall be remembered
kindly and blessed, she said.

Life wasn't finished for us yet. We're going to live!

And there was a revolution on the way and another war to go to anyway.

I leave the stage. I don't come back to bow.

CUE 14: Audience lights.